



How to 'WOW' at a First Interview

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How to make a Terrific First Impression

Human beings are a very judgemental species. Apparently, men decide on whether they like someone in two minutes and women in thirty seconds. However, I would say thirty seconds and instantly would probably be more accurate! What is a fact is that it then takes twenty minutes of positives to change that initial opinion. So leave the Homer Simpson tie and fluorescent pink socks in your wardrobe!

Keep your appearance conservative - dark suits, white blouse/shirts, etc. Women, in particular, pay very close attention to hands and shoes so pay that attention to the detail; clean fingernails, polished shoes, subtle aftershave/perfume, etc. Don't overdo the 'bling', keep tattoos covered,

Turn up on Time

If the journey is going to take forty-five minutes – allow an hour and a quarter. Arrive 'early and calm' rather than 'just in time and frantic'. En route, take fifteen minutes in silence to imagine yourself in the role, your responsibilities, the job requirements. If nervous, spend the remainder of journey listening to some favourite loud music, particularly 'anthem' songs that you can sing along to. Raise those endorphins and arrive totally focused, pepped up and 'in the zone!'

Upon Arrival

Go into reception ten minutes early; be friendly, polite and pleasant to everyone that you meet – the person in overalls that nods at you as you walk into the building could be the CEO.

It's the little things that often make the big difference. If you found the directions easy to follow, if you like the receptionists tie, the flowers on reception, the company logo, whatever, then say it BUT only say it if you mean it!

PA's and Receptionists are often asked their opinions, their 'gut feel' as part of the decision process (particularly in smaller companies) so that five minutes of pleasantries with reception about the weather, the traffic and how easy you found them, could clinch you the role.



Upon arrival, read the literature, sit calmly, and make notes. Alternatively you could remain standing as this creates an impression of energy and importance and quite literally keeps you 'on your toes!'

Smile

Smiling costs nothing, give you confidence and people's perception of you will be more positive! Smile at everyone you meet and pass. The perfect Hollywood smile is one where you go to bite into an imaginary apple (try it in front of a mirror it's hilarious). However always smile with your eyes and mean it – women in particular can pick up on a false smile (and are more instinctive in picking up untruths, falseness and fake laughter)

Handshake & Eye Contact

Ensure your handshake is confident but not too firm – in the UK a solid grip (not a vice grip) and three 'pumps' of the shake is the norm. When you meet the interviewer for the first time look at their eyes long enough to register their eye colour and think of someone who they remind you of – this will be perfect initial eye contact and enable you to remember them on sight for the next meeting!

Seven Brilliant Interview Tips

1. Plan Your 'Small Talk'

Prepare beforehand the small talk that you will use to get through that initial 'sounding each other out' stage. Talk about (non contentious) current affairs, how nice the offices are, how friendly the receptionist is, how easy to find the offices were, how good the tea is. If all else fails talk about the weather – but whatever small talk you make ensure that it's positive – they want to hire a winner not a whiner! Maintain solid, but natural eye contact, nod in agreement, use open handed hand gestures.

2. Take a notepad into every interview and use it!

Taking a notepad will make you come across more professional and interested in the role (and help you remember what was discussed in order to prepare for the second interview!). Ask to take down notes – you'll get a 'brownie point' for being polite, let them subtly see the research that you have undertaken in preparation for the meeting. Invest in a document case where you can have your pad on the right side and your interview questions and even a list of your strengths and aspirations to the left side. When you get that tough question – a quick dart down to your left and you'll be back on track.

3. Build Rapport and Mirror the Interviewer

Mirror the style of the interviewer. Subtly mirror their body language – if they lean back, lean back yourself, if they use expressive hand movements do so yourself, try and talk at the same pace in the same range of tones. If you breathe at the same pace as the interviewer you will find yourself communicating at a similar pace. BUT be natural, don't try to be someone that you are not and use natural body language. Over-emphasised body language is very easy to spot, makes you come across as staged and contrived. I have even had interviewees come across as 'weird' or 'intense' because they took this mirroring advice far too literally so beware!

4. Listen!

We're all heard the cliché two ears and one mouth – but it is imperative at interview. Listen to what's not being said as much as what is! Observe body language, eye movement and ensure the interviewer is engaged by what you have to say. Don't monopolise the conversation, be succinct in your answers and don't waffle. Ask acknowledgement questions i.e. 'did that answer your question' to ensure that the interviewer is engaged. Don't tell anecdotes unless they are highly relevant to the question and are backing up your case. If asked questions such as 'give an example of a risk that you have taken', 'what's the biggest regret of your life' always answer them in a way that will show you in the best positive light. Skilled interviewers will lull you into a 'false sense of security'



and before you know it you're telling them that your idea of a perfect holiday is drinking twenty pints of lager a night!

First interviews tend to be a test of personality, character and basic fit i.e. could they see you working with the existing team, fitting in with the corporate culture, team dynamics, etc.

5. Ask Questions throughout the meeting

The best interviews are a two way process - where the balance of conversation is equal. In fact top books for interviewers say that the perfect balance should be 60/40 (60% Interviewee and 40% interviewer). Prepare questions beforehand and ask them at natural points throughout the meeting.

There is nothing worse for an interviewer who asks 'Any questions?' (as an invitation to close) and in reply gets a list of questions at the end - what are the hours, why do you work here, etc. - it's very unnatural!

6. Know your facts

Know your CV inside out. Ensure that you are able to back up, substantiate and elaborate on any claim that you have made on your CV. Know your clients, your targets, your processes. Take along testimonials, sales league tables, certificates of achievement/training, etc.

7. Take your time

If you are unsure of the question or its' relevance, ask for clarification. Don't be afraid to take a few seconds to compose your succinct answer to the question (3-4 seconds goes unnoticed, shows you're composed and gives you the thinking time to construct that killer-answer!)



Trial Interview including Common and Tough Interview Questions

If you have followed the exercises in 'How to prepare for an interview' you are now prepared to answer 60-70% of all common interview questions. Armed with this high statistic you are now fully prepared to give your best – your innate sales ability will carry you through the remaining 30-40%!

You can buy books giving you all of the answers to the main interview questions and I have met, and interviewed candidates who have evidently worked through and memorized the content of these books and they come across as insincere. Their answers are just too rehearsed and too robotic. Experienced interviewers are looking beyond the actual words of the answers are also looking to see if there is parity between what is being said and the body language of the interviewee.

My advice therefore is to read these questions as a 'dummy-run', a good opportunity to put your 'How to WOW' exercises into practice. Don't learn answers verbatim but feel confident that in knowing your strengths, and having the ability to back them up with achievements, examples and case studies that you will succeed at interview.

Listed below are the most common interview questions likely to be examined at interview and grouped by theme. Good Luck!

The Most Common Interview Questions (You will be asked these ones in a round-about way at every interview!)

Tell me about yourself?
What do you know about our company?
What interests you about this job?
Why do you consider yourself ideal for this role?
Give me five reasons why you want to join our company?
What are your strengths?
Do you prefer working alone or in a team?
What are your development areas (weaknesses?)
What motivates you?
What are you going to achieve in the next 3 years/5 years/10 years?
What do you like about your current job?
What do you dislike about your current job?
Why are you looking to leave your current role?

Sales and Business Development

What is the worst objection that you've ever had to handle? Talk us through how you tried to handle this objection?
What is your preferred technique to handle objections?
How do you ensure that your sales targets are exceeded each month?
What is your favourite closing technique?
How do you pick yourself up after losing a potentially large order?
How do you create a sense of urgency to speed up the sales process?
What is the largest account that you have ever won and talk me through the stages from start to close?
What is the largest account that you have lost and talk me through the stages?
What is the most difficult piece of business that you have ever won?
Have you ever walked away from a sale and why?
What do you consider to be the single most important sales skill?



Sales Management

What does effective Sales Management mean to you?
What personal qualities should a Sales Manager possess?
What are the personal qualities that you possess to make you a successful Sales Manager?
What is more important 'managing' or 'leading'?
Talk me through the most difficult employee that you have ever had to 'lead'?
What is the biggest learning curve that you have worked through in your path to becoming a successful Sales Manager?
What is your Management style? Do you think this style is the most effective?
Who is the best Manager that you have ever worked for? What qualities did they possess that you have modelled to improve your ability to lead sales teams.
How important is it that sales professionals are effectively managed?
How do you manage egos within your sales team?
What is the best example that you can give me that describes your management style?
What have you personally done to develop your management skills?
How do you handle responsibility?
How do you keep a distance between yourself and your reports?
Your worst performing sales executive has a personal crisis and needs significant time off – how would you support them?
From the choice of Churchill, Gandhi, Alex Ferguson or Richard Branson, who is the most effective leader and why?

Planning and Prioritising

How do you plan each day?
What are your objectives each day?
How do you measure yourself against your objectives?
What importance do you place upon planning each day/week/month/quarter/year?
Think of a sentence that would describe your mission each day – your personal daily mission statement?
How do you prioritize your accounts?
How do you ensure that you are the most effective that you can possibly be?
Why would you prioritise one account over another? What criteria would you use to prioritise accounts?

Presentation and Pitching

What experience do you have in making presentations?
What is the largest audience that you have ever made a presentation to?
Talk me through an example of a piece of tender led business that you have won?
What makes your presentations a success?
What techniques do you use to handle difficult clients during a pitch?
What is the typical structure of your business presentations?
How would you describe your PowerPoint skills – non-existent, Basic, intermediate or advanced (see IT tutorials to brush up on your PowerPoint skills if needed!)
Talk me through the most difficult pitch that you have made?



Decision Making, Risk and Judgment?

What is the greatest risk that you have taken in your business career? What happened?
What would you detail as the biggest failure of your business career?
For every decision that you get right how many do you get wrong?
How do you make a decision that potentially carries enormous risk? What steps do you go through? What minimum information do you require?
What experience do you have in working in pressure situations?
How do you make decisions in these pressurized situations?
How would one of your reports describe your decision making ability?
What is the worst decision that you have ever had to make in your business career? What happened?
What is the best decision that you've ever made in your business career?

Teamwork

Are you more effective on your own or as part of a team?
What is the best team that you have ever worked in and why? What part did you play in the team and what contribution did you make to the success of the team?
What are the characteristics of a great team?
How important do you feel the 'leader' is in creating a successful team?
What types of characters do you work best with?
What kind of people do you find difficult to work with?

Personal qualities - Confidence

On a scale of one to ten how confident would you describe yourself? Why?
How would your existing team describe your confidence?
Talk me through a situation that demonstrates the level of confidence that you have in yourself?

Personal qualities -Interpersonal

How would your best friend describe you? 5 adjectives
How would your closest work colleague describe you? 5 further adjectives
Describe the relationship with your current/previous line manager?
How would your current/previous line manager describe you? 5 further adjectives
What is the single biggest issue that your current/previous line manager has with you?
Describe a confrontation that you have had with your current/previous line manager when they were in the wrong?
What happened?
When was the last time that you lost your temper at work? What happened? What did you learn from this?
What kind of people do you find difficult to work with?
How do you handle criticism?
Who is your worst enemy? What happened? How would they describe you?
What is the most unpopular decision you've ever taken? What happened?



Personal qualities –Values

What are your values?

How would you like to be remembered?

What is an ethical line that you will not cross?

Have you ever lied to win a sale? What happened?

Would you ever lie in the interests of your company?

Have you ever gone over your current/previous line manager's head to get a decision?

On a scale of one to ten how would the term 'maverick' describe you?

What habits or behaviours that you possess would you like to change/improve?

Who have you worked with that you have the most respect for? Why? What did you learn from them?

Other Questions

In addition to this you must be prepared for questions on current affairs, your hobbies and interests and your ambitions, goals and aspirations. Also interviewers are now regularly probing deeper into your psyche, your friends, family, upbringing, why you've taken certain decisions in your life, what is your purpose, major driving factor, etc. The tasks in 'How to WOW' will go some way in helping you prepare for this.

The one area that you simply cannot prepare for are the 'showboat' questions – 'If you were an animal what would you be and why', 'If you were a colour what colour would you be and why?' Answer politely with a wry smile on your face safe in the knowledge that here is an interviewer that is obviously deficient in some area and needs to give his own self esteem a boost for being so 'clever'!

Conclusion

Remember that it is useful to look at interview questions to get your mind in tune for an interview, particularly if it's been a while since you were last interviewed, but it is imperative that you do not learn your answers parrot fashion. Have complete confidence that if you know who you are, where you are going, your strengths, your experience and your achievements that you will be just fine. Absolutely fine.



How To Tackle The Dreaded Yet Inevitable "What Are Your Weaknesses?" Question

Chocolate digestives dunked in tea, a pint (or six) of Beer on a Friday night or a bacon sandwich smothered in Heinz tomato ketchup on a Sunday morning...? You're not alone. However that is beside the point.

No interviewer will expect brutally frank answers like "I have a below average intelligence" or "I am extremely difficult to work with" or even "I turn up about 20 minutes late to work most days." However interviewers will probably expect standard textbook "canned" answers such as "I work too much. All I do is work, work and work." Although, your potential employer would not appreciate or believe this typically clichéd, completely transparent answer and they will probably think you are either lying, or even worse that you are telling the truth. If this is the case and you define working too much as a weakness is what you are trying to say that you don't really want to work much after all?!

Honesty (to a reasonable and sensible extent) is most definitely the best policy. Commonly, an interviewer will be deliberately trying to expose you to this kind of question to see how well you are able to respond to such pressure. Remember to remain calm when the question is asked and try not to appear flustered or bothered in any way. It is often the mental fear of the unknown which produces the physical symptoms of nervousness. However if you are prepared mentally and expect the question you will be geared up to the answer 'the feared question.' After all, this can be the most difficult question put by the interviewer to check your honesty and confidence levels. However, don't try to portray yourself as Mr or Miss Perfect, this will only come across as fake and employers do understand that each and every one of us have some flaws.

From The Interviewer's Perspective

The usual "I work too hard" and "I'm a complete perfectionist" predictable answers will make the interviewer feel as though they are dealing with a candidate that they can't really trust and someone whom they are going to have a hard time in developing an open and honest working relationship with. Furthermore, they still won't be aware of any of your 'real' weaknesses either.

If you are able to provide more truthful answers the interviewer will have a much greater chance of judging if they can work around your weakness. This therefore not only helps the employer but consequently helps you. After all, you wouldn't want to work for someone who wouldn't be able to cope with a weakness which could inevitably lead to a dismissal from the organisation.

It's Simple: Honesty Really is the Best Policy

Whatever you do, tell the truth. Whilst there are quite obviously answers that interviewers prefer to hear, you have to make sure it matches up to reality. Why? Firstly, it's not a great idea to get hired for a job that you're not matched for (even if your inner 'during interview mode' self is able to obtain the job through the art of the 'blag' and your understanding of being able to produce the answers interviewers want to hear).

Secondly, any good interviewer will check your references. If your answers don't match what they've heard from you, it's extremely likely that you'll lose the chance of being offered the job. Assuming you want to land a position where you'll thrive, this should be your goal too - and unfortunately, honesty is more likely to get you there. Just provide well prepared yet honest answer and fingers crossed you will have that dream job in no time!

A Sales Role But Your Greatest Weakness Is Selling... ?!

It cannot be stressed enough that the weakness you talk about are not a key element of the position. In simple terms, don't mention a big weakness that could cost you the job - however if your greatest weakness is one of your main job roles, you probably shouldn't be applying for the job after all. Your aim is not to lie but merely present yourself and your core assets to the best of your ability. We're all composed of strengths and weaknesses however this doesn't mean that we tell an interviewer every little detail about what we do wrong within the workplace (and certainly not in your personal life). For example, if you are being interviewed for a Sales Manager role in charge of a 50 man team, it probably isn't best to mention that you have trouble getting along with people seeing as the job role will constantly involve working with others.



So How to Answer: Talk About a Weakness That You're Actively Working To Overcome

Don't sugar coat or try to make a negative a positive, alternatively you should select a personal weakness of yours that you have been actively working to overcome. Think seriously about your weak points; what have you struggled with in the past? What have past Managers encouraged you to do differently? If you were able to wave a magic wand over your head and change something about your work skills or persona, what would it be?

The weakness you choose should come out as a problem which is almost solved; it shouldn't be a critical and hopeless trait that cannot be helped. An example could be that you've had trouble in the past with planning and prioritisation. However, demonstrate and clearly explain that you are taking steps to correct this (this could be through the use of a pocket planner or simply actively making more lists throughout the day to ensure work tasks are completed).

8 Examples of Possible Answers

Please don't 'copy and paste' these answers during your interview, but use them as a basic structure for formulating your own creative answers. Remember to answer the questions 'behaviourally' with specific examples that show clear evidence that backs up what you are saying about yourself. Always provide information that shows that you want and can become the very best sales employee for the company and that you have specifically prepared yourself to become exactly that. Bear in mind, they want to be sold to, they are waiting to be sold to, so make sure you don't disappoint!

Example 1: The One Who Loves All the Little Details - *"I am sometimes overly concerned with details but I have learnt that delegation solves this aspect and I am now using it often."*

Example 2: The One Who Likes To Take Their Time - *"One of my weaknesses is that I have to occasionally compromise on time to achieve quality and perfection."*

Example 3: The One Who Focuses on Quantity Not Quality - *"I feel I am not very detail-oriented. I'm a person that wants accomplish as much as possible. I realise this negatively effects quality and therefore I'm trying hard to find a balance between quality and quantity."*

Example 4: The One Who Likes To Do It Alone - *"At times even when I need help, I try to solve my own problems instead of asking a co-worker who might know the answer. This would save me a great amount of time and I would be more efficient. I'm working on understanding and knowing when it would be beneficial to ask for help."*

Example 5: The Impatient One - *"I believe one of my weaknesses is my impatience. Whenever I work in a team and any of the team members do not perform up to my expectation, I tend to get extremely impatient and annoyed. I do understand if they're working hard and if their sales portion is difficult, but there are occasions when a person can't do an assignment due to incompetence and laziness. I'm trying to work on this weakness by explaining things to some people in greater detail and encouraging 'lazier' individuals by reminding them of deadlines."*

Example 6: The Not So Organised One - *"When I first started in the work world, I found that I wasn't as naturally organised as I wanted to be. Without a system to keep track of everything I was juggling, I had trouble keeping all the balls in the air. So now I make lists religiously and check them every morning and every afternoon to make sure that nothing is slipping through the cracks and all my priorities are correct. I'll never give up my lists, because I know that without them, my natural state is a less organised one."*

Example 7: The One Who Hates All the Paperwork - *"I really have a dislike for paperwork. I've found it's easier for me to address the issue if I set aside specific times during the day to fill out forms. If I break it up into small portions, it's not so bad to deal with."*

Example 8: The One Who Likes the Bigger Picture - *"I'm really great with the 'big picture' and have learned to surround myself with people stronger at dealing with detail work than I am, as I quite often struggle in this area."*



Practice Makes Perfect (It really does!)

Whilst the "weaknesses" question often brings that horrible lump in your throat try to be enthusiastic and confident when responding to probably the most negative question that you can (and probably will) be asked. Don't rush your answers (this won't make your weakness look any better) and don't ramble on and on and on either! Try to um, avoid, um, like, using, unnecessary words, yeah? And um, you know, don't repeat yourself, or, like actually, use, annoying kind-a-like phrases, you know what I mean?

Look at the Job Description for Help

To help figure out what an employer is looking for always take a good look at the job description. This will give you tips as to the qualities that an employer is looking for. You can then work out the skills and qualities that are vital to that role to ensure that one of your main weaknesses doesn't affect being able to perform the duties and tasks necessary.

To Conclude

Never say you are a "workaholic" or a "perfectionist" because overall it just sounds negative. Try to convert negative biased qualities into positive ones. Remember every one of us has our own unique mix of strengths and weaknesses. Although it may be that you will indeed be asked to discuss your weak points during your sales interview, all successful applicants are able to turn these moments around and move into a more positive conversation. However, do not be consumed by your weaknesses. Learn what exactly it is that you do well, what it is that you need to improve upon and then build your career plan on your knowledge of both.

Close the Interview

If you are interested in the role - tell them. Ask how the interviewer feels about your suitability to the role. Ask what the next stage of the process will be. Show you are keen. More information will follow on this in the next instalment of 'Land Your Dream Sales Job'

Sell Yourself and Enjoy Yourself

On Day One we looked at your goals, dreams, ambitions and aspirations. Don't be afraid to discuss these at interview, it demonstrates that you are goal oriented, taking a career move seriously and that you have drive and purpose.

Remember if you enjoy the interview you will shine at interview. The more planning that you do on yourself as a product the more succinct and prepared you will come across. Above all be enthusiastic and sell yourself throughout!

Thank You

Ask for a business card from the interviewer and upon your return send them a short email to thank them for their time, reiterate your interest and follow up with any supporting documentation that you may have mentioned at interview (that could help your case)



How to WOW at a Competency Interview

If you're a candidate that's been invited to a competency interview, you may be feeling a bit anxious as to what exactly this is going to entail.

Firstly, a competency interview is just a posh term for an interview where you'll be asked questions like *"can you give me an example of when you have..."*, rather than theoretical questions like, *"what would you do if?"* So all you need to do is to *really* know what you've done and to fully understand your career highlights, achievements and performance.

So what's the best way to prepare for it? I would recommend taking two hours out with your CV and a pad and a pen of paper and really go through the roles that you've had.

Ask yourself - What were you selling? Who were you selling to? What were your targets? How did you perform against targets? What were the key performance indicators that you were working to? What was the account that you turned around? How did I improve efficiency/productivity/methodologies? Who was my boss and what did I learn from them? What sales style was encouraged? Really understand all of that information.

At the same time, think of a big account that you won or a complex account that you won right the way through from start to finish. So where did you get the lead from the first place? Who did you meet with initially? How did you follow it up? How did you get the quota? And so on and so on-- to the point of closing that sale.

Also think of a problem client that you've had, or perhaps an account that you've turned around, or an account that you've significantly developed, something a bit tricky.

The questions that you'll be asked, and the way a competency interview works, is that they interviewer will have a pre-prepared interview format. And they'll be looking at specific skills, attributes, qualities, and will be scoring you against those.

So to give an example, let's just say that customer service is the attribute or competency that you are going to be scored upon. You'll be asked a question such as; *"Can you give me an example in the last 12 months of when you've gone beyond the call of duty to provide exceptional Customer Service?"* What they will then be doing is gathering *evidence* from your reply and scoring against that, normally on a scale of one to five, sometimes out of a scale of one to 10.

But it's important that you really do articulate your answer well and ask for acknowledgement that you've provided the evidence required, i.e. Would you like some more information on that? Is there anything more that I can go into on that or perhaps detail another example that's going to help you? The more you ask questions like that, the more information you give, the more evidence they gather, the higher you will score.

Then, at the end of it, typically, an interviewer will be looking at somewhere between five and eight competencies during a competency-based interview, maybe a couple more for management roles.

At the end of the interview, it's like any other sales interview. So good luck with the competency interview, don't be daunted by it. If you know yourself and your achievements then you'll be fine!



5 Tips to Help You Control Your Nerves in an Interview

1. En route to the interview listen to some really powerful 'anthem' that resonates with you. Sing it at the top of your voice (if you're alone in the car – on a packed train you might get yourself arrested!)
2. Arrive early so that you're relaxed and compose yourself in the car.
3. In reception whilst waiting read the company information and use deep breathing techniques – breathe in through your nose for five seconds and out for seven.
4. Chat to the receptionist and smile and acknowledge everyone that passes through reception. Interviewers love candidates that are chatting to the receptionist as it really demonstrates the 'ability to create rapport at all levels'. NB The receptionist is often asked by the interviewer 'what did you think of them?'
5. If all else fails to control your nerves imagine that the interviewer is i) Naked ii) 6 inches tall iii) talks in a really squeaky cartoon accent! You'll smile, intuitively they'll have to smile back and rapport will be established!

Five Questions That You Should Ask at Every Interview

Here are some questions that you should ask at every interview that you attend.

- Number One, Why is the position vacant?
- Number Two, What challenges does the company currently face?
- Number Three, How can you help overcome these challenges?
- Number Four, What are the expectations on you in the first three months, six months, and year?
- And Finally, How do they feel you're going to fit in with their team?